



MITIGATED DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE

Description of proposal:

The 2006 Lynx Habitat Management Plan is a non-project proposal. It is developed in response to the federal listing of the species as threatened (USFWS 2000) and revises the 1996 DNR Lynx Habitat Management Plan (WDNR 1996) that had been developed in response to the Washington State listing of the species as threatened in 1993. The plan guides DNR in creating and preserving quality lynx habitat through its forest management activities. It allows DNR to meet state and federal requirements for protecting the lynx, while at the same time providing revenue through sustainable forest management, as well as meeting its other land management obligations (i.e. recreation).

The plan covers approximately 126,212 acres of DNR-managed lands in each of the six Lynx Management Zones recognized by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Stinson 2001).

In order to plan and manage effectively for lynx habitat through time, DNR has defined and classified lynx habitat based on the available scientific literature. Five habitat categories are identified: Open Areas, Temporary Non-lynx Areas, Forage Habitat, Denning Habitat, and Travel Habitat.

DNR's lynx conservation strategy has a multi-leveled structure that reflects the complexity of managing habitat for large terrestrial carnivores. The strategy applies four nested spatial scales: Ecoprovinces, Lynx Management Zones, Lynx Analysis Units, and Ecological Communities. Management guidelines and lynx habitat ratios are specified for each spatial scale in accordance with the specific conservation objectives.

DNR will monitor and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the Lynx Habitat Management Plan and will report to United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biennially. DNR is committed to following the Lynx Plan until the lynx is delisted, or until 2076 (80 years after the approval of the 1996 Lynx plan), whichever is shorter. The plan will be updated as more is learned about lynx habitat relationships and management strategies, at least as frequently as every five years hereafter.

Description of mitigation:

The mitigation measures described in the 2006 Lynx Habitat Management Plan ensure that the implementation of the plan is likely to avoid the take of Canada lynx and will contribute to the conservation of Washington's lynx population. The mitigation measures listed below are based on the concepts and management guidelines of the 1996 Lynx Habitat Management Plan; modifications listed in the Agreement Letter to Avoid the Incidental Take of Canada lynx from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service dated April 26, 2002; changes in the Lynx Management Zones as identified in the 2001 Lynx Recovery Plan for Washington State; changes in the conservation status of some DNR-managed lands within the lynx range; and incorporation of new information obtained through implementation and monitoring of the 1996 Lynx Plan and review of the recent scientific studies on lynx ecology, conservation, and management.

1. Continued commitments from the 1996 Lynx Habitat Management Plan:

- A system of lynx travel routes will be maintained to connect DNR-managed lands with neighboring lynx habitat and to provide access to drainages throughout each Lynx Management Zone (LMZ). Travel routes will follow features that naturally connect landscapes, such as major ridges, saddles, streams and wetland networks.
- Connectivity within LMZs on DNR-managed land will be maintained. Where DNR-managed land is in a critical position (e.g. a narrow constriction within the LMZ, especially along the British Columbia border), forested strips at least 330 feet (100m) wide will be positioned to facilitate lynx travel through the area, and/or harvest units will be placed to promote connectivity.
- Timber harvest units (Temporary Non-lynx Areas) will be designed to promote swift vegetative regeneration and snowshoe hare/lynx recolonization.
- Human-related disturbance will be considered in road, harvest, and recreation plans on DNR-managed lynx habitat. Strategies to promote lynx security in road and harvest plans may include decommissioning non-essential roads after harvest, placing gates to limit vehicle access, avoiding loop roads, considering roadless logging techniques, limiting sight distances on roads, and maintaining vegetation on the shoulders of roads.
- To minimize potential impacts to snowshoe hare/lynx habitat from livestock grazing, DNR will implement grazing guidelines and requirements that move the resources toward the conditions described by House Bill 1309 Ecosystem Standards for State-owned Agricultural and Grazing Land.
- To ensure that potential denning structure is available across the landscape, at least two den sites per square mile of DNR-managed lands will be provided in all Lynx Management Zones where DNR manages at least one square mile.
- In Lynx Analysis Units (LAU) where DNR manages more than 20 percent of the LAU (Loomis State Forest and Little Pend Oreille block):
 - DNR will maintain a minimum of 70 percent Forested Habitat (defined as at least 180 trees per acre greater than 3.3 feet above average snowfall). This Forested Habitat will consist of a minimum of 20 percent Forage Habitat, a minimum of 10 percent designated as Denning Habitat (including at least 2 den sites/mi²), and 40 percent Travel Habitat. No more than 30 percent of the lynx matrix will be Temporary Non-lynx Areas.
 - Forest management activities will be scheduled to ensure interspersions of habitat components within the lynx habitat matrix over time - no more than 10 percent of a LAU will be managed at the lower end of the stocking levels that define Forested Habitat (greater than 180 trees per acre) at any one time; Forage Habitat will be connected by travel corridors to Forested Habitat within the LAU and located near Denning Habitat; and timber harvests will be scheduled and designed so that at least 50 percent of the periphery of designated Denning Habitat will be bordered by Forested Habitat at all times.
- DNR will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the Lynx Habitat Management Plan and will report biennially to USFWS and WDFW. The monitoring data and new scientific information on lynx ecology and conservation will be used to evaluate the plan every five years or more frequently by mutual agreement between DNR, USFWS, and WDFW.

2. Modifications described in the USFWS Agreement Letter (USDI 2002)

- DNR will not harvest forested areas that meet the definition of Denning habitat from May 1 to July 31. This is applicable to all DNR-managed lands within Lynx Analysis Units

- regardless of percent ownership.
 - DNR will not allow any increases in designated or groomed snowmobile routes or snowmobile play areas within the area covered by the 2006 Lynx Plan.
 - Pre-commercial thinning will be delayed until self-pruning processes have excluded most live lower limbs within two feet of the average snow pack level. This is applicable to all DNR-managed lands within Lynx Analysis Units, regardless of percent ownership. Exceptions from this restriction are thinning activities, which would be a part of an experimental design approved by USFWS, and stands within DNR's Pend Oreille seed orchard (approximately 40 acres).
 - DNR will not convert more than 15 percent forested lynx habitat to a Temporary Non-lynx habitat condition within a 10-year period within any individual Lynx Analysis Unit. This is only applicable to Lynx Analysis Units where DNR manages more than 20 percent of the Lynx Analysis Unit.
 - Within the Little Pend Oreille block and Loomis State Forest, DNR will not convert more than 5 percent of the lynx habitat within a Lynx Analysis Unit to the minimum requirements for Travel habitat in a 10-year period.
3. In accordance with the revised Lynx Management Zones and Lynx Analysis Units identified by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in the Lynx Recovery Plan (Stinson 2001), the 2006 Lynx Plan will cover 126,212 acres, an increase of 1,177 acres from the area covered by the 1996 Plan.
 4. Part of the DNR-managed lands covered by the 2006 Lynx Plan will be managed under the laws covering Natural Resource Conservation Areas and specifically under the Loomis Natural Resource Conservation Area Management Plan (WDNR 2003). The Loomis Natural Resource Conservation Area (24,677 acres) was established in the Loomis State Forest in January 2000.
 5. Incorporation of new scientific information resulted in the adoption of a new Forage Habitat definition. Defining prey habitat through the horizontal cover above average snow level allows some older forest stands to meet Forage Habitat definition.

Proponent: Department of Natural Resources

Location of proposal, including street address, if any:

The 2006 Lynx Habitat Management Plan covers all DNR-managed lands within the six Lynx Management Zones identified in the Lynx Recovery Plan for Washington State (Stinson, 2001). Generally, this area is located east of the Cascades crest to the Idaho border and north of Highway 2 within the following counties: Okanogan, Chelan, Colville, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille.

Most of the area is above 4000 feet elevation and is characterized by boreal coniferous forests and accumulation of deep snow. DNR manages four percent of the primary lynx habitat in Washington - approximately 126,212 out of 3,198,238 acres of designated lynx habitat in Washington. Most of the lynx habitat managed by DNR (approximately 77 percent) is in the Loomis State Forest, which is in Okanogan County.

Lead agency: Department of Natural Resources

The lead agency for this proposal has determined that it does not have a probable significant adverse impact on the environment. An environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c). This decision was made after review of a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the lead agency. This information is available to the public on request.

☐ **There is no comment period for this Mitigated DNS.**

☒ **This MDNS is issued under 197-11-340(2); the lead agency will not act on this proposal for 14 days from February 6, 2006. Comments must be submitted by February 21, 2006**

Responsible official: Victoria Christiansen

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Date 2/3/2006

Signature: 

There is no agency SEPA appeal.
11/09/00